

What Is Claimed Is:

1. A method for operating an internal combustion engine (1) having a fuel-driven combustion motor (5), in which fuel is delivered under pressure to the combustion motor (5) via a fuel delivery system (10), wherein a pressure decay rate in the fuel delivery system (10) is determined; and a fault is inferred as a function of a comparison of the pressure decay rate with a predefined threshold value.
2. The method as defined in Claim 1, wherein the fuel pressure is regulated to a setpoint; for the case in which an actual pressure value does not reach the setpoint during a predefined time, a fault is recognized and the pressure decay rate in the fuel delivery system (10) is determined; and the type of fault is determined as a function of a comparison of the pressure decay rate with the predefined threshold value.
3. The method as defined in Claim 2, wherein an emergency mode action is initiated as a function of the type of fault.
4. The method as defined in any of the preceding claims, wherein a leak in the fuel delivery system (10) is recognized in the event the absolute value of the pressure decay rate exceeds the predefined threshold value.
5. The method as defined in Claim 4, wherein the internal combustion engine (1) is shut off once a leak in the fuel delivery system (10) is recognized.

6. The method as defined in Claim 4 or 5, wherein restarting of the internal combustion engine (1) is blocked once a leak in the fuel delivery system (10) is recognized.
7. The method as defined in any of the preceding claims, wherein a fault in the fuel supply system (15) is recognized when the absolute value of the pressure decay rate falls below the predefined threshold value.
8. The method as defined in Claim 7, wherein a limitation of the quantity of fuel delivered is activated once a fault in the fuel supply system (15) has been recognized.
9. The method as defined in any of the preceding claims, wherein once a fault has been recognized, the internal combustion engine (1) is also shut off, regardless of the type of fault, when the internal combustion engine (1) is being operated at idle or at low load below a predefined load threshold.
10. The method as defined in any of the preceding claims, wherein for the determination of the pressure decay rate, a high-pressure circuit (20) is separated from a low-pressure circuit (25) of the fuel delivery system (10), and the pressure decay rate in the high-pressure circuit (20) is determined.
11. The method as defined in any of the preceding claims, wherein a warning message is transmitted once a fault has been recognized.